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MAGICAL FACTORS IN THE FIRST DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN LABOR¹

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The beginnings of human labor imply more of psychological problems than theoretical economy and ethnology usually admit.

We notice the common characteristic of primitive tribes, that they work or labor far less than we. I am using the word "labor" in our presently accepted sense of its meaning as a continuous, purposive and organized activity, comparatively independent of accidental stimuli, and sharply distinguished from play. Play finds immediate satisfaction in itself; while labor is always swayed by, and directed towards, more or less remote ends.

The comparatively small amount of labor engaged in by primitive peoples, obviously, is of great consequence for all early civilization. Putting aside moral considerations of leisure, egoism, and so on, this fact is usually interpreted as due to a lack of intelligence and knowledge. If primitive man, it is supposed, could know the useful consequences of a stronger and better organized form of activity, he would learn it and begin to work.

However, there are many instances, proving that primitive man, while possessing knowledge and understanding of certain kinds of economic labor, yet fails to apply himself regularly and continuously. Psychologically, he is unable to do so. On the other hand, the same men are not so absolutely unrestrained, not so shiftless and dominated only by momentary impulses, as are our tramps or criminals. Under certain conditions, we see them performing extensive and very accurately regulated kinds of work. All primitive tribes try, by complicated procedures, directly to influence the weather, the movements of the stars, birth, sickness and death, puberty, the reproduction of plants and animals in nature, and other

¹ This article is a summary of two addresses given at the recent Cleveland meeting of the American Psychological Association and before the Philosophical Club of Columbia University.

Detailed materials and more elaborate discussion will appear in a series of monographs, entitled: "Arbeiten zur Entwicklungspsychologie."

natural processes—a thing we do not attempt at all, or which we treat in a much more indirect manner.

Even where the co-operation of human activity *can* be causally very effective, as in preparing for war or the chase, in making weapons, adornments or other implements, and in the beginnings of agriculture, the care of animals or barter: the *form* itself of such activity is seldom free from very irrational factors. The more the end is subjectively important, and the less clearly its real causal relations are understood—the more primitive man's active behavior is surrounded by, and impregnated with, *magical* elements. Oftentimes a semi-rational procedure is prepared for, or followed by, a purely magical ceremony. A large part of a primitive tribe's waking life is filled with singing, music and, especially, dancing. All these—quasi-play and quasi-artistic—activities were originally more than mere amusement. First they are immediate, involuntary expressions of emotional tension. Very soon they pass into a form of conventional ritualism. Dancing and related rhythmical activities, in particular, are believed directly to effect remote ends that are subjectively represented in a more or less confused form. Dancing and music are the magical instruments *par excellence*.

An African boy was asked by a missionary why he did not work, at least as much as did his aged parents. He answered, "I dance day and night." Obviously, he implied that this activity is much more important for the whole life of his tribe, than the more rational work of women and old men could possibly be.

In many primitive languages we find one word used as a term for dancing, singing, magical ceremonies and working. In Latin "*cantare*" originally meant the same as "*incantare*." In Greek, the word for labor, "*ergon*," is derived from "*orgia*," in the sense of a rhapsodic psychophysical behavior. In semi-barbarous religions most of the gods as well as the priests are dancers, singers and musicians.

Karl Bücher collected a large amount of material, proving the rhythmical character of primitive labor. However, his genetic analysis is incomplete and his psychological interpretation is too intellectualistic. He neglects the dominating emotional factors in such phenomena, evidenced by the magico-religious apperception, in the primitive mind, of rhythm and music as well as of all those forms of activity believed to be vitally important.

When we seek in human development for the beginnings of a complicated, continuous, organized and serious activity,—

in a word,—for the beginnings of labor in the psychological sense, we find them in magical ceremonies or in those forms of regulated occupation which are centred around magical behavior and institutions.

They are the first regulated forms of social activity—regulated not only in time and space but also qualitatively.

There are facts which tend to prove that, originally, man (like animals) even for eating and sleeping observed no fixed times. Magico-religious ceremonies usually occur about sunset. The more important ones, like initiation or burial ceremonies, since they are participated in by large numbers, even from distant tribes, must be decided upon weeks or months in advance. These ceremonies break the earlier custom of isolated eating (which is also—but in a more negative and primitive sense—magically conditioned). Of course, this first eating and drinking in common must be largely prepared for in advance and, to a certain extent, presupposes self-restraint and forethought. The place for such ceremonies also must be fixed and prepared. It seems that, generally speaking, the first psychologically accentuated places were the holy and dangerous ones, where a man had died or lay buried, where ancestors had performed some magically important activity, where a woman first felt the stir of foetal life, and where at set times ceremonies are to be performed.

Qualitatively, these ceremonies are better ordered and differentiated than are any other forms of primitive activity. Any change in the succession or form of such acts is believed to cause immediate illness or death; a single mistake, occurring, for instance, in one of the numerous, complicated dances of Indians of the Northwest is punished by death. The initiation-ceremonies (especially those for the boys) with their long-extended preparation, are characterized by painful and other impressive forms of treatment.

Genetically speaking, such magical and religious regulations of the life first teach self-restraint, growing independence of momentary stimuli, self-sacrifice,—all of which are essential conditions of man's *capacity* to work.

Even those members of the tribe who take no active part in a ceremony are deeply influenced by it and by many of its relations. The women and young children are usually excluded from all of the more important ritualistic performances, objects and places, because they are considered too weak to undergo the varied and terrible dangers involved. This fact increases, for the whole tribe, the emotional value

of the magico-religious performances of the men. At the same time, it constitutes a basis of the first forms of division of labor and all social organization. The women are habituated to the renouncing of a large number of pleasures and important experiences, and they are accustomed to continuously care for their young children; they also perform many semi-mystic activities pertaining to their sexual and maternal life. All of these things co-operate in giving to women a peculiar class of duties and volitional habits, such as the care of fire and water, the regular supply and preparation of food (even for the future), the first forms of pottery, textile industry, agriculture and market-barter. While such economic activities were originally the exclusive task of women, the more they become complicated, of importance for the whole tribe and intricately involved, the more they are shared in by the men. For instance, all relations to foreigners, with their political and juridical consequences, are regulated by the men, because of the semi-mystic dangers emanating from every stranger.

The political and related affairs are usually the exclusive business of the adult, unmarried initiates, who are able to fight and hunt. This group, at an early stage of cultural development becomes consolidated and differentiated from the whole tribe. From its peculiar location in the camp, evolves the "Men's-House;" originally it excluded all uninitiated and all married people. From this germ there have gradually grown up the temple and memorial hall, the place for regular dancing and music, the forum, court and King's palace, the arsenal, fortress, guest- and clubhouse. The activities taking place in the Men's-house, originally have the general characteristic of being dangerous, of vital importance for the whole tribe and therefore shot through with magical elements. In this same house we first find regulated and socially organized industry.

Every magical performance itself is believed to be dangerous in so far as it is effective and powerful. Therefore, the number of persons participating tends to be increased, in order that individual danger may be diminished. Magico-religious reactions condition the earliest careful social division and correlation of functions. On the same basis arises the peculiar role of the *old* men and women, who are better acquainted with the ceremonial rules, apperceived as concurring with the will of ancestors. The whole group of women gradually come to perform determined kinds of ritualistic

activity, even in the absence of the men, but nevertheless in functional correlations with their qualitatively different activities.

Finally, the first regular occupation or profession, which is engaged in by *single* individuals, is that of the magician, medicine-man or prophet. The political or military leader is usually the same man, or one closely related to him; at any rate, he is held to possess extraordinary magical, and consequently hereditary, powers. In an analogous manner, the differentiation of the more special, industrial professions, such as that of the blacksmith, is supported and conventionally fixed by the belief in a supernatural gift, with which such men are endowed.

These magical, and therefore dangerous, powers radiate through the apparel, the implements and every act or thing tangibly connected with these persons. And the more powerful a person, the more his substantialized magical forces survive his death, regulating the lives of the following generations.

Thus, from magico-religious qualities and "taboo" arise all primitive social privilege and every institution of group or personal property.

It is obvious that all of these relations are of utmost importance for the strengthening and deepening, for the individual as well as for the social differentiation and integration, of voluntary activity.

The confused but intensive feelings (with their habitually regulated reactions) towards the supernatural dangers and powers, effectively co-operate in liberating the will from exclusive rule by momentary impulses and instinctive mechanisms. Once escaped from this thralldom, the individual and social will continue to twine itself about an increasing number of more highly developed irrational supports. Step by step, intermediate links between momentary stimuli and human reaction become more numerous, harmonious, and structural, while the originally disconnected magical stirrings, organize and differentiate themselves into religious, aesthetic and moral feelings, into social conventions, political institutions and economic practices.

It would be a mistake to infer from these considerations that the development of civilization originally was purely magical or religious, that religion had a development distinctly previous to that of economy, social organization, artistic production, etc. On the contrary, it is a common characteristic of primitive civilization that all of these directions of human behavior are undifferentiated. However, the higher the vital

importance of an institution or form of activity is held to be, the more it is freighted with and integrated by irrational elements of a magico-religious character. These elements though originally unanalyzed from the beginning form centers of emotional stress and crystallization. From thence take their origin, numerous and ramified channels of volitional directiveness. To such facts is closely related even the evolution of the judgment and the intelligence, which is continuously supported by the evolution of emotional and volitional reactions in their totality. Every peculiar ability or knowledge is originally apperceived as being a magical power, substantiated in certain persons and related objects. The first conception of causality is that of magical necessity; and, later on, the idea of universal natural law is prepared for by the conception of the all-embracing power of the Divine.

We are unable to understand the psychological continuity of human development towards our individual and social forms of life without genetically taking into account the magical and religious reactions of primitive mind upon every impressive experience, and to every situation of vital importance.